

Statements (India) - Cuba: Resist Imperialism, Defend the Democratic Rights of People, Question State Policies that Create Hardships

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Since 1992, Cuba has brought the demand to end the U.S. embargo every year in front of the UN — a motion that is approved annually with the overwhelming support of the international community with the deafening exception of the U.S. and its closest ally, Israel. The non-binding request was, in fact, introduced again just about a month ago, and was approved with 184 votes in favour, two against (USA and Israel), and three abstentions (Colombia, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates).

For years, the U.S. has hidden behind the excuse of fighting for “freedom” and “democracy” in Cuba while continuing to implement an embargo that starves the very people it claims to want to “free.” This claim has been repeated in the past week by U.S. politicians on both sides of the aisle. In a press conference on 11th July, the mayor of Miami, Francis Suarez, called for an international intervention into Cuba under US leadership.

For large parts of the Indian left, any protest against the so-called socialist states at any point of time has been seen as illegitimate and imperialist sponsored. This stems from the basic premises of Stalinism. In the case of Cuba, Indian Stalinists have put the entire responsibility on the imperialists, following the Cuban CP itself.

Undoubtedly, US imperialism bears much of the long term responsibility. The protests in Cuba come in the midst of the worst economic recession in 30 years. For months, videos circulated on social media have shown people expressing dissent over the shortage of basic necessities, the long queues for food, and the government’s mismanagement of the pandemic. According to the latest reports, in just the period of March 2019-2020, the embargo has caused an estimated \$5.57 billion in damages to the Cuban economy. As the pandemic spread globally, the impact of the sanctions have been more disastrous, especially as the country’s primary industry, tourism, suffered terribly. The country’s gross domestic product fell by 11 percent. With businesses and restaurants still shuttered, many Cubans are now unable to work. Cuba’s plan to vaccinate the majority of the population by September has hit a snag, since syringe production is affected due to the sanctions.

To stop here, however, would be to assume that whatever the Cuban Communist Party has done must be accepted uncritically. Support for the Cuban revolution cannot mean silence about the role of the current (or previous) leadership. The pressures of imperialism cannot be withstood by a bureaucratic state apparatus which only tries to “mobilize” masses while stifling dissent. The process of liberalization that was started by the Raúl Castro regime is now rapidly continuing with the Díaz-Canel government. On the one hand, there is severe austerity for the masses in the form of inflation and cuts in “undue subsidies and free services,” as the government calls them. This came with the withdrawal of the CUC (Convertible currency) from circulation on January 1 and the implementation of a single exchange rate of 24 pesos (CUP) = \$1, which resulted in the devaluation of the currency by 2400 percent. On the other hand, there is a new battery of measures to “attract

foreign investment” and strengthen the private sector, the small and medium-sized merchants and business people who employ no more than a few dozen people. The aim of these measures is to bring in foreign investment with an ambitious “portfolio of opportunities” with more than 500 projects, mainly in tourism and oil, for \$12 billion. But the most important measure was the announcement of the end of the obligation of majority-Cuban state participation in investments in tourism, biotechnology, and wholesale trade.

The protests that occurred have been a mixed bag, and certainly, as yet, relatively small. But the regime came down hard, and declared it wholly sponsored by imperialism. In a press conference, Díaz-Canel denounced U.S. imperialism, painting all protesters as counterrevolutionary and asked for “revolutionaries” to take to the streets and “defend the revolution.” Indeed, we reject the right wing, the church, and the “Patria y Vida” movement that continue to capitalize on this discontent over the situation in Cuba, attempting to stifle the continuing conquests of the revolution, and set the path for capitalist restoration. However, this is not the whole story. Although the first protests began peacefully, almost all the demonstrations ended up seeing violence, which was carried out by both sides. This series of simultaneous anti-government demonstrations is something never before seen in socialist Cuba. This must be taken into account to understand the events.

Three characterisations of the protests in Cuba on 11 July have been given. The government claims they were a confrontation between counterrevolutionaries and communists; the bourgeois press globally say they represented the oppressed rising against a dictatorship; others have argued this was a revolutionary working class against a politically degenerate bureaucracy. In reality, the 11 July protests brought together the three previous perspectives: the counterrevolutionary organisations—financed by the United States—violently attacking the Communist Party; groups of intellectuals, who feel their civil liberties severely restricted, facing censorship; and the working class demanding that the government improve their living conditions. However, although the overwhelming majority of protesters belonged to the third category, this cannot be understood as a politically conscious socialist mass, demanding more socialism from a stagnant bureaucracy.

Key Features of the Protest

- Most of the protesters were not linked to counterrevolutionary organisations, nor were the protests led by counterrevolutionary organisations.
- The political legitimacy of the government is diminishing as shown by the large number of young people among the protesters.
- The protests originated in the working class neighbourhoods with the greatest social problems. Social inequality is a growing problem in Cuban society. Poverty, social neglect, precariousness of public and social policies, limited supply of food and basic products by the state, as well as poor cultural policies, are characteristic of life in peripheral and lower-income neighbourhoods.
- The protests did not represent a majority. Most of the Cuban population continues to support the government.
- In the protests there were hardly any socialist slogans.
- A small number of intellectuals were linked to the protests. but their demands for right to free expression and uncensored artistic creation had little resonance with the majority demanding basic improvements in life.
- Lumpen groups were responsible for looting and vandalism distorting the otherwise peaceful spirit of the demonstrations in Havana.

- Counterrevolutionary propaganda orchestrated from the US via social media certainly played a role but were not the main factor triggering the protests.

The Way forward

The defence of the revolution is not a defence of the Communist Party bureaucracy which is entrenched in the state, but of the gains made by the working class in the revolution to expropriate the capitalists. Revolutions can be toppled by imperialism. But revolutions can also be subverted by one-party state bureaucracies that lead the way to capitalist restoration.

We defend the right to demonstration and union organization of those who fight to defend and deepen the conquests of the Cuban Revolution.

We call for an immediate release of the political prisoners as long as they have not committed actions that have threatened the lives of other people.

The only way forward is to participate in the popular protests, to defend within them an independent socialist program, to work towards the creation of much more direct institutional forms of popular democracy even as we continue to oppose and challenge US imperialism and reactionary efforts to overthrow the regime but without becoming apologists for top down bureaucratic rule.

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